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Alaska News & Resources

- ## National News & Resources

- ## 1. Kids Don't Float - Site Sponsor Newsletter Coming

If you sponsor a Kids Don't Float loaner board and we have not contacted you, please contact us!

Call Maria Bailey at 907-465-4170 or email her at KDF@health.state.ak.us

2. Snowmobile Highmarking - WHY HIGHMARK KILLS

by Doug Fesler and Jill Fredston

Doug Fesler and Jill Fredston, both avalanche specialists, are Co-Directors of the non- profit Alaska Mountain Safety Center, Inc and the Alaska Avalanche School.

Highmark, the challenge of riding a snowmachine as high as possible on the side of a steep, snow-filled mountain is great fun that requires skill. But if you climb a

So far, 13 people have died in snowmachine-related accidents this winter, including three last weekend. That compares with 11 by the same time last year. By the end of last season, 24 people had died.

Like last winter's, this season's accidents have been spread around the state, from the streets of Fairbanks to the icy waters of Norton Sound, and have involved a variety of circumstances.

Five people drowned after breaking through thin ice or running into open water, one man died of exposure, and four deaths involved collisions. Other riders were thrown from their sleds or had them roll over them.

The most recent accident occurred Sunday, when Josh Oberg, a 22-year-old Big Lake man, was killed after he was struck in the head by the ski of his friend's snowmachine.

The men had been jumping a hill between clearings north of Petersville, said trooper Mike Sears, who investigated the accident.

The men, heading in opposite directions, hit the hill at the same time. Oberg was apparently still on the ground while the other man, Wesley Jurica, 20, had just become airborne, Sears said. The ski hit Oberg in the head, ripping off his helmet.

Just a few hours later, a Minnesota man died after he lost control of his snowmachine while riding on a river near Fairbanks.

Randy Larson, 30, was riding with his brother and a friend on the Salcha River when he apparently lost control and ran into a 3-foot-deep fissure, troopers said. He was thrown from his machine and died on impact, trooper Michelyn Contreras said. She estimated his speed at between 40 and 60 mph.

Troopers said both men appeared to be experienced riders and both were wearing helmets.

"They had been riding awhile," Sears said. "They were really into this."

Contreras said speed was a factor in Larson's accident.

"People just need to take the time to think about what the results of their actions could be," she said. Rodney Morgan of Lower Kalskag died Saturday from head injuries he suffered in a snowmachine collision the day before on a snow-and ice-covered road.

Though no official snowmachine fatality records are kept in Alaska, a Daily News examination last spring of state medical databases, law enforcement records and newspaper archives showed last season's toll was at least the worst in a decade and probably the worst since snowmobile travel took root in the 1960s.

Last winter's accidents also ran the gamut from people killed in avalanches and collisions to one accident in which a snowmachiner struck a pedestrian and both were killed.

Stephen Tower, an orthopedic surgeon who has extensively reviewed snowmachine deaths and injuries in Alaska, said the number of snowmachine accidents has been steadily rising over the past decade.

"Am I surprised that's it's going up? No," he said. "It's going up because (snowmobiling is) an activity becoming more popular and because the machines are becoming more capable."

At the same time, he said, the sport is largely unregulated with no requirements for operator training or age restrictions.

Tower, who has lobbied for more safety education and requirements for snowmachine riders, said he's particularly concerned about the number of accidents involving children.

This winter three youths under age 16 have been killed, including a 12-year-old Barrow boy who drowned in September after his machine broke through ice in a sewage lagoon. Two ninth-graders from the coastal communities of Elim and Golovin are also believed dead after they apparently lost their way in a December snowstorm and drove into the open water of Norton Sound. Searchers found tracks leading to the open water but have found no sign of the teens.

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5. New National Resource Center Provides A Central Source for Youth Violence and Suicide Prevention Information.

www.safeyouth.org/home.htm

6. Family Shopping Guide for Car Seats - American Academy of Pediatrics

Safety and Product Information from the American Academy of Pediatrics

www.aap.org/family/famshop.htm

7. Child Passenger Safety Week - February 11-17 2001

As part of Buckle Up America, and in observance of Child Passenger Safety Week, NHTSA is asking all our partners to work with us to encourage parents and caregivers to have their child safety seats inspected and follow the four essential steps to protect children in motor vehicles:

- a. Use rear-facing child seats for children from birth to at least 20 pounds and at least one year of age.
- b. use forward-facing child seats for children under 20 pounds and at least one year old to about 40 pounds and about age four.
- c. Use belt-positioning booster seats for children from about 40 pounds to about 80 pounds and 4'9".
- d. Use seat belts for older children large enough for the belt to fit correctly; at least 4'9" tall and about 80 pounds.

Link to NHTSA site:

www.nhtsa.dot.gov/people/injury/childps/boosterseat/CPS_Week.pdf